PurushaMriga And Bhima

The PurushaMriga is a strange Sphinx-like mythical creature. This divine creature has the face of a serene rishi and the body of a lion-like animal. The PurushaMriga, an ardent devotee of Shiva is not visible to mortals. It is believed that those who can see it are blessed with Bhakti for Lord Shiva.

We find two similar tales related to the PurushaMriga – one in the Ramayana and the other in the Mahabharata. After developing their capital city at Indraprastha, the Pandavas decide to perform the Rajasuya Yagna because they want to get the blessings of their ancestors. Yudhishtra asks all his brothers to go to the neighbouring kingdoms and get their support.

The PurushaMriga in the Ramayana

Bhima decides to go to Kubera's kingdom in the north. He meets Lord Hanuman, his brother along the way. Lord Hanuman plucks out three strands of hair from his tail and gives it to Bhima. He says, "Just keep them safely Bhima. You will need them in the near future." Bhima does not understand Lord Hanuman's strange request but respects him. So he follows his instructions without asking him any questions.

When Bhima reaches the kingdom of Kubera, he is greeted warmly. Kubera donates generously for the Rajasuya Yagna much to the delight of Bhima. But Bhima is surprised to find a peculiar creature called PurushaMriga strolling in Kubera's garden.

Bhima meets the PurushaMriga

Bhima is dumbfounded when he gets all the details of the mystical PurushaMriga from Kubera. But he knows he is blessed because he can see the divine PurushaMriga. He invites the PurushaMriga to the Rajasuya Yagna and asks him if he would guard the entrance of the Yagna for them.

The PurushaMriga agrees to do so but lays down a strange condition. It says, “I am Shiva’s bhakta. My sole purpose in life is to meditate on my Lord. I travel at the speed of thought – ‘Manovega’. I will come with you only if you assure me that I will be able to meditate on my lord continuously. I will follow you but the minute you block my path and disturb my concentration in any way, I will eat you up.”

Bhima thinks for a while. He has full faith in his agility. He looks at the short stout legs of the PurushaMriga and is sure that he can outrun him with ease till he reaches Indraprastha. So he agrees to the condition.

Bhima starts running..

Bhima starts running without even waiting for the consent of the PurushaMriga. But Bhima obviously does not know what he is getting into because no matter how fast he runs, he finds the PurushaMriga always close to his heels.

He wonders how he can save his life. That is when he remembers the three strands of hair that his brother lord Hanuman had given him. He removes one strand of hair carefully from the folds of his garment and tosses it behind his shoulder.

He is amazed because the minute the strand of hair lands onto the earth, a million Shivalingas appear there. Bhima knows he cannot indulge in the luxury of lingering there to find out more about the miracle. He continues to run as fast as he can.

The PurushaMriga worships Shiva

But the PurushaMriga suddenly halts in its track because it is pleasantly surprised to find a million Shiva lingams in a beautiful temple there.

The PurushaMriga has a bath in the holy tank, worships each lingam with great devotion and then marches ahead at the speed of thought to catch up with Bhima. Bhima uses all the three strands of hair to buy some time for himself. But by the time he reaches Indraprastha, the PurushaMriga manages to catch up with him again. Bhima sets one foot within the boundary of Indraprastha but the PurushaMriga is right behind him and catches hold of his other foot which is still outside Indraprastha.

The PurushaMriga pins Bhima’s mighty frame onto the boundary of Indraprastha and calls out to Yudhishtra to seek justice. Yudhishtra listens to the entire story calmly and says,

“O PurushaMriga, since one of Bhima’s legs lies inside the boundary of Indraprastha, he is its rightful owner. But you are free to eat up the other leg of Bhima that lies outside Indraprastha.”

The PurushaMriga releases Bhima instantly, bows down to Yudhishtra and says, “O Yudhishtra, you are Dharmaraja indeed. I was testing you. And I am impressed by your brother Bhima’s alacrity and agility too. I was able to meditate upon my lord Shiva continuously only because Bhima gave me the opportunity to worship millions of Shivalingams on my way here. I will grant you any wish that you desire.

Krishna and the PurushaMriga

Krishna had already arrived there to attend the Rajasuya Yagna. So Yudhishtra seeks Krishna’s counsel in the matter. Krishna looks at the mighty beast and says, “Help the Pandavas while they perform the Rajasuya Yagna. After the Yagna is complete, go to Chidambaram and wait there for Shiva. Shiva will perform his cosmic dance, the Ananda Tandava there at the right time. Your job from then on will be to guard the entrance of this temple and ward off all the negative energy around it.”

The PurushaMriga was eager to obey the command of Krishna. So after fulfilling all his duties at the Rajasuya Yagna, he took leave from the Pandavas and went to Chidambaram.

The PurushaMriga in the Mahabharata

According to the Mahabharata, Krishna had given Bhima 12 Shivalingas before he set out to meet Kubera. Bhima tosses one Shivalinga every time the PurushaMriga catches up with him and so is able to reach Indraprastha before the PurushaMriga almost catches up with him.

The PurushaMrigas outside the Chidambaram temple

The Chidambaram temple in the Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu in South India enshrines Shiva as Nataraja who is totally engrossed in his Ananda Tandava, the dance of delight. Two PurushaMrigas stand guard outside the temple even today. It is believed that the PurushaMriga absolves the sins of the devotees and wards off the evil forces around the temple premises.

Significance of this PurushaMriga idol

The PurushaMriga stands on the Bali Peetam, the inverted lotus with the KalpaVriksha, the wish-fulfilling tree behind it. A mouse-like animal feeds itself from the udder of the PurushaMriga.

This story shows us how Bhakti can transport us to a different realm, help us (at least temporarily) forget our worldly challenges and make us more understanding and forgiving.

But the insight that we glean from this idol is beautiful indeed. Only when we leave behind the KalpaVriksha of our endless desires and surrender Kama (Lust), Krodha(Anger), Lobha(Greed), Moha(Delusion), Mada(Pride) and

Matsarya(Envy) on the Bali Peetam of our conscience can we create space for Bhakti in our souls. And like the mouse, if we seek, reflect and consciously apply what we learn from such stories, we may even end up getting a glimpse of the PurushaMriga in our realm someday.